

**State Director's Report to the
Central California Resource Advisory Counsel
Anthony Community Center, Visalia
May 9-11, 2013**

On behalf of BLM California State Director Jim Kenna:

- I want to thank the RAC members for your service and contributions to the BLM and the public lands throughout central California. Fiscal Year 2013 will be both rewarding and challenging, and I appreciate your commitment to share ideas and work together as advisors to the BLM.
- **Congressional/Legislative Update:** The 113th Congress includes fourteen new members in the California delegation, including Reps. La Malfa (CA-01) and Huffman (CA-02) from Northern California, and several new House members from southern California: Paul Cook - District 8, David Valadao - District 21, Juan Vargas - District 51, Dr. Raul, Ruiz - District 36 and Mark Takano - District 41.

I have begun outreach with some of the new members and will meet with them during my annual visit to Washington D.C. in June. The BLM also is tracking new/resubmitted legislation, including numerous bills specific to the three proposed military withdrawal and/or withdrawal expansions in southern California, and several National Conservation Land designations throughout California (California Coastal National Monument Expansion Act of 2013, Berryessa Snow Mountain National Conservation Area, and Clear Creek National Recreation Area and Conservation Act).

- **Budget** – For the remainder of Fiscal Year 2013, we will continue to operate under a continuing resolution through September 30, 2013.
- **American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012:** For the past year BLM California has strategically been planning how to minimize potential impacts resulting possible budget reductions and the across-the-board spending cuts known as sequestration. As a result, BLM employees will not be furloughed. However, budget reductions will impact most if not all BLM programs. Therefore, we will continue to strategically realign our workload priorities to ensure we achieve state and national mission-critical goals and objectives, while balancing budget reductions with realistic reductions in workload capabilities.
- **BLM California's Strategic Framework:** BLM California has three business lines: Sustainability, Heritage, and Community, set upon a foundation of Operational Excellence and our Core Values. Each business line expresses three outcome goals that outline long-term direction and desired results for public land management, and set workload priorities across programs in support of BLM's mission to sustain the health and productivity of public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Northern California District

- **Sage Grouse Habitat Restoration:** BLM California is participating in the development of a national strategy to preserve, conserve, and restore sagebrush habitat, the ecological home of

the greater sage-grouse. The BLM will issue national policy and direction, based on local needs and information, to guide the agency's actions and raise the importance of sagebrush conservation in BLM planning efforts. At the local level, the BLM will work on formal plan amendments for BLM RMPs to reflect the conservation measures. Greater sage-grouse habitat is addressed in as many as 98 BLM land use management plans.

- **Extended Drought Concerns:** Alturas and Surprise field office staff have notified livestock grazing permittees that a drought watch is now in effect, and grazing reductions will be mandated if precipitation does not increase this spring. Under a longstanding drought policy, if precipitation remains below 75 percent of average by the end of March, the BLM will declare a drought, and reduce/remove livestock from allotments earlier than normal. BLM staffs are working closely with permittees to monitor range conditions and precipitation.

California Desert District

- **The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP):** The Renewable Energy Action Team, a collaborative effort between the California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the BLM and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is preparing the DRECP. The Plan will protect and conserve desert ecosystems while facilitating development of renewable energy on Federal and non-Federal lands in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties. The draft is scheduled for public release in the summer of 2013 and the final in early 2014.
- **Renewable Energy Update** – Development of clean renewable energy remains a high priority for the State, the BLM and the Department. In December Pattern Energy brought 94 turbines on the Ocotillo Express Project online. Unit 1 of Ivanpah Solar is nearing completion, and several new projects are under construction. Within the first quarter of 2013, the BLM anticipates signing the Record of Decision for the West Chocolate Mountain Renewable Energy Evaluation Area, and Secretary may sign the Records of Decision for the Desert Harvest Solar Project near Desert Center, and McCoy Solar Project near the City of Blythe. The BLM also is analyzing numerous other proposed renewable energy projects.
- **Military Withdrawals** – The DoN/USMC, in consultation with the BLM and Department of the Interior (DOI), drafted legislation for the DoN's proposed 25-year renewals of current withdrawals for the China Lake Naval Weapons Station and the USMC Chocolate Mountain Aerial Gunnery Range that will expire October 30, 2014, and a withdrawal expansion of the USMC Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (MCAGCC) at Twenty-nine Palms, CA to accommodate live-fire and Marine Expeditionary Brigade training. The draft legislation has been submitted to the Office of Management and Budget to resolve/mitigate any DOI/DoN discrepancies before it is submitted to Congress for consideration/approval.

On February 15, 2013, the DoN published the Record of Decision (ROD) for the proposed MCAGCC withdrawal expansion in the *Federal Register*, selecting Alternative 6 in the final EIS: 103,618 acres of public lands within the 188,000-acre Johnson Valley Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (OHVRA) would be lost to exclusive military use; 43,049 acres would be designate as a Shared Use Area; and 21,304 acres of adjacent private lands would be acquired for exclusive military use.

The loss of 103,000 acres of public lands within the Johnson Valley OHVRA would permanently eliminate regional and nationally recognized OHV recreational events, as well

as organized and unorganized OHV recreational opportunities, and other casual recreational activities such as camping and filming. The proposed expansion would displace more than 200,000 visitors annually and impact local, regional and state economies.

Numerous subsequent bills have been recently introduced proposing various alternatives to the proposed withdrawal renewals/withdrawal expansions. The BLM/DOI will continue to work with the DoN/USMC on the proposed legislation in an effort to ensure both the short and long term uses of these public lands are in the best interest of the American people.

- **Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Business Plan:** Stakeholder collaboration is ongoing in an effort to reach broad level consensus about the Plan can help design the path forward. It is critical we find balance regarding the need for services the public wants and available funding. With the projected declines in available grants and appropriated funding this will be difficult. I encourage everyone to continue working through the review process to ensure the BLM has an adequate plan for the present and future management of the extraordinary recreational resources at the Imperial Sand Dunes.
- **Magistrate Tours Portions of West Mojave Planning Area:** On February 12-15, BLM California Desert District managers and staff escorted U.S. Magistrate Nandor J. Vadas, plaintiff representatives, and attorneys on a field tour of sites within the West Mojave Planning area to observe areas impacted by illegal off-highway vehicle activity and enforcement measures implemented by the BLM to mitigate impacts. The visit will afford the magistrate a better understanding of the vastness of the WEMO planning area by air and provide an opportunity to view specific issues on the ground such as route proliferation, mitigation measures in progress, challenges to route enforcement, urban interface and management actions.